

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHWN #0518/01 1231734
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 031734Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4625
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1705
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J5 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEHCV/USDAO CARACAS VE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRIDGETOWN 000518

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/18/2017
TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR BB XL
SUBJECT: BARBADOS PM ARTHUR'S CABINET

Classified By: CDA Mary Ellen T. Gilroy for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Prime Minister Owen Arthur, Barbados' most popular politician, is well positioned to win an unprecedented fourth term in the next parliamentary election, which is expected later in 2007 or in 2008. He will run on his solid record of achievement over the past 12 years, supported by a strong cabinet team that includes many proven political operatives and rising stars. END SUMMARY.

ELECTION TIMING UNCLEAR

¶2. (U) Prior to the Cricket World Cup (CWC), the conventional wisdom considered it almost inevitable that Barbados' next parliamentary elections would take place later in 2007, even though they are not constitutionally mandated until 2008. Prime Minister Owen Arthur holds a commanding lead in public opinion polls, Barbados' economy is growing at a respectable clip, and he has assembled a strong team to contest the next elections. Nevertheless, with the CWC generally proving to be a disappointment for the region, speculation is rife that PM Arthur may seek to put a safe distance between the CWC and the elections, so that he does not have to face the voters freshly disillusioned by the region's poor CWC showing.

A GOOD RECORD AND A STRONG TEAM

¶3. (U) When he does call the elections, PM Arthur will contest them with an experienced team, well-tested during the 12 years it has been in power, and an impressive record of economic growth and political stability during his premiership. The opposition has charged, however, that PM Arthur's record is not as solid as it would appear because most Barbadians continue to cite in public opinion polls high costs of living and housing as their top concerns. Both sides will therefore seek to run on PM Arthur's record, but naturally with very different interpretations thereof.

¶4. (U) PM Arthur's cabinet includes a number of prominent, experienced, and charismatic politicians who will also be a formidable campaign team in the next election. While critics have charged that after 12 years in power, PM Arthur's team has lost its energy and imagination, the opposition has so far failed to present an alternative that Barbadian voters would be willing to trust. Barbadians may feel that PM Arthur and his government have failed in addressing some of their major concerns, but polling consistently suggests that they are not willing to cast their lot with the opposition

just yet.

THE "POWER PUFF" FACTOR

15. (C) While short profiles of key cabinet members are included below in para 7, three members of PM Arthur's cabinet, dubbed the "Power Puff Girls" by political commentators, deserve a special mention. Deputy Prime Minister Mia Mottley, Foreign Minister Dame Billie Miller, and Energy Minister Elizabeth Thompson are indisputably Barbados' most successful female politicians. They control key positions in PM Arthur's cabinet and are usually at the forefront of his major initiatives. This trio of powerful women set the BLP apart from the opposition Democratic Labour Party (DLP), which fielded few female candidates in past elections and currently has no female members of parliament. The trio's appeal, however, did not escape the DLP's notice. In the next election, the DLP plans to field four female candidates, and the opposition leader David Thompson has pledged that, if elected, he would include at least one woman in his cabinet.

16. (C) In contrast, the BLP's female leaders seem to be losing some of their stature. The trio will be weakened with the planned retirement of Dame Billie, who has announced that she will not stand in the next election. While Mottley and Thompson will likely continue playing important roles in the next PM Arthur administration, should he be reelected, the BLP has not managed to put forward a suitably experienced and impressive female candidate to take the place of Dame Billie. Some commentators have also noted that the BLP "Power Puff Girls" lost some of their influence during a February 2006 cabinet shake-up, in which PM Arthur moved Mottley from the powerful Attorney General job to the lower-profile Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development. PM Arthur, however, defended the transfer by arguing that Mottley would have an opportunity to broaden her experience in economic matters.

KEY CABINET PROFILES

17. (C) Profiles of key cabinet members:

Owen Arthur, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance: PM Arthur is a skilled and popular politician, who will lead his BLP into the next election and who would serve an unprecedented fourth term as premier should the BLP win. Under his leadership, Barbados has enjoyed 12 years of political stability, steady economic growth, and social progress. Like other leaders in the region, PM Arthur weighs Caribbean solidarity and national sovereignty as important factors in charting Barbados' foreign policy. For these reasons, his government strongly disagreed with U.S. policies in Iraq and Haiti. On the other hand, PM Arthur has resisted Venezuelan encroachment into the region and worked closely with President Bush to derail Chavez's disruptive agenda at the 2005 Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata. He has been a strong proponent of economic integration in the Caribbean region and has lead responsibility within the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) for the implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME).

Mia Amor Mottley, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Affairs & Development: Mottley is generally considered to be PM Arthur's anointed successor, although some have speculated that since the February 2006 cabinet shake-up, her star may be shining less brightly. She joined PM Arthur's cabinet in 1994 and became Barbados' youngest minister at the age of 29. She is a dynamic and charismatic politician and a powerful speaker. A trained lawyer, she is famous for her combative nature and acerbic tongue, prompting some observers to question her ability to moderate her sharpness to gain the top job. Mottley is widely believed to be gay, which may also hinder her aspirations.

Dame Billie A. Miller, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and Senior Minister: More than any other

member of the current cabinet, Dame Billie fits the "elder statesman" role. She has been a powerful voice for Barbados and the region on the international scene. During more than 30 years in politics, she has held various ministerial portfolios. She is also a strong advocate for the city of Bridgetown, the constituency she represents in parliament, and claims credit for the current revitalization of the city's downtown and waterfront areas. Last fall, Dame Billie announced that she will not run in the next election, but promised to remain active in politics.

Henrietta Elizabeth Thompson, Minister of Energy and the Environment: "Liz" Thompson, as she is popularly known, has headed the important Energy Ministry since 2006. She has been charged with developing Barbados' energy resources, including planned off-shore projects. Thompson was first elected to parliament in 1994 and served as Minister of Health and Environment from 1994-99. Disagreements with PM Arthur forced her departure from the cabinet in 1999, but she returned two years later to run the Ministry of Housing and Lands. In the past, she has worked as a lawyer and newspaper reporter.

Dale D. Marshall, Attorney General and Minister of Home Affairs: In the February 2006 cabinet reshuffle, Dale Marshall succeeded Mia Mottley as Attorney General. He was concurrently appointed as Minister of Home Affairs. Previously, Marshall chaired the Board of the National Housing Corporation, the Urban Development Commission, and the Barbados Tourism Authority. He was appointed to the Barbados Senate in January 1999, serving there until April 2003.

Clyde A. Mascoll, Minister of State, Ministry of Finance: Mascoll holds the distinction of being the first--and only--opposition leader to have crossed the parliamentary floor to join the government, which Mascoll did in 2006. Mascoll's unprecedented step followed a protracted struggle over the DLP leadership with current opposition leader David Thompson. Mascoll was rewarded for his trouble with a cabinet-level job in the Ministry of Finance, a posting consistent with his academic training and professional experience in finance and economics. Although Mascoll has kept a relatively low profile since joining the cabinet, he will likely attract much more attention during the next election, when many observers wonder whether he will be able to defend his seat despite--or thanks to--his political change of heart.

Reverend Joseph J.S. Atherley, Minister of State, Prime Minister's office: Atherley, an ordained minister, has become the voice of PM Arthur's government since his appointment to the cabinet in February 2006. Although he has been charged with the culture portfolio, he appears frequently at public events, speaking on everything from education and health to family values and matters of faith. Prior to assuming his cabinet post, Atherley served as a parliamentary secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs.

OURISMAN